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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 RIYADH 000296

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TAGS: PREL ELTN SA TU
SUBJECT: TURKISH PRESIDENT PUSHES TRADE & MEDIATION DURING
VISIT TO SAUDI ARABIA

Classified By: POL Counselor Lisa Carle,
1.4(b) & (d)

¶1. (C) SUMMARY & COMMENT: Turkish President Abdullah Gul
emphasized trade and Middle East mediation attempts during a
four day state visit to Saudi Arabia February 3-6, according
to Turkish Embassy Counselor Cihad Erginay (protect). Gul
responded to King Abdullah's request for help with Syria by
telephoning Assad. The visit was heavily publicized, with
the Saudis repeatedly expressing loud appreciation for
Turkish Prime Minister Erdogan's dressing down of Israeli
President Peres in Davos. Riyadh and Jeddah were festooned
with Turkish flags days before the visit to underscore the
point. A number of bilateral trade and technical cooperation
agreements were signed, but Embassy has seen no evidence of
specific plans regarding Gaza or Syria beyond offers to
mediate. END SUMMARY & COMMENT.

¶2.   KEY POINTS FROM GUL'S MEETING WITH KING ABDULLAH:

-- (C) The Middle East was the main topic of discussion, and
Gul pushed "louder than we normally do," said Erginay, for a
more active Saudi role in the Middle East and told the King
Turkey would support the efforts of U.S. Special Envoy
Mitchell.

-- (C) Gul also told the King Turkish contacts with Israel
would continue and that Turkey saw its contributions as
"complementary" to other peace efforts. For example, said
Erginay, some Palestinian factions do not want to deal with
Egypt, so the Turks are willing to talk with these factions
instead.

-- (C) The King expressed appreciation for Turkey's Middle
East role, and told Gul he wanted to reach out to Syria, was
disappointed the Syrians had not followed up after the Kuwait
summit, and would welcome Turkish intercession with Damascus.
 Erginay added that Gul followed up by telephoning Syrian
president Assad February 9.

-- (C) Gul told the King Saudi Arabia should be more active
in Iraq, to which the King replied "Insh'allah."

-- (C) Gul raised the King's interfaith dialogue initiative
"because it was important to the Saudis," and suggested
possible "synergy" between the initiative and the
UN-sponsored Alliance of Civilizations (originally a
Turkish/Spanish idea).

¶3. OTHER SUMMIT HIGHLIGHTS:

-- (U) Gul brought a 300 member delegation including his
ministers of defense, trade, and transportation, and over 100
business representatives.

-- (C) Gul met ten Saudi ministers, including Foreign
Minister Prince Saud al-Faisal and Deputy Defense Minister
Prince Khalid bin Sultan. He did not see Saudi Intelligence

chief Prince Muqrin, who was "unavailable."

-- (C) The heads of state signed bilateral agreements on maritime transport and youth/sports, and marked the entry into force of agreements on double taxation, investment promotion, and land transport. A prisoner exchange agreement was not completed in time for the summit.

-- (U) Gul addressed the Majlis al-Shoura, and both sides were surprised to discover he was the first Muslim head of state to do so.

-- (C) Gul visited a site where a Turkish firm modernizes armored vehicles for the Saudi military.

-- (C) The Saudi press headlined Gul's invitation to Saudis to study at Turkish universities. According to Erginay, Turkey hosts only about 300 Saudi students, partly because Saudi students often need extra work to meet Turkish academic standards, but also because the nearest place Saudis can take the Turkish university entrance examination is in Jordan. "We should do something about that," Erginay said.

-- (C) Saudi media also trumpeted a supposed agreement to rebuild the historic Hejaz railway. Erginay said the summit discussed a possible rail link between the Gulf region and Europe through Turkey, but not necessarily via the Damascus-Medina route of the line built by the Ottomans and famously destroyed by Lawrence of Arabia in the First World War.

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¶4. (C) ERDOGAN'S ADVISOR SPEAKS: On the margins of the visit, Poloffs attended a public lecture by Professor Dr. Ahmet Davutoglu, Turkish PM Erdogan's chief foreign policy advisor. According to Erginay, Davutoglu has been directly involved in inter-Palestinian talks and contacts between Israel and Syria.

¶5. (U) TURKEY'S REGIONAL ROLE: Before an audience that appeared to include a high proportion of religious Saudis, Davutoglu staked out a large regional role for Turkey based on geography, history, politics, and culture, touching on Iran, the Caucasus, the Middle East, the Balkans, and Darfur (Darfur remained "Ottoman" until 1928, he claimed). Turkey is a "country of synthesis," he said, and a "test country" for global relations in the 21st century. He emphasized Turkey's democracy and future in the EU, but also noted that Turkey has one of the highest concentrations of mosques in any Muslim country. All of Turkey's identities are "compatible," he asserted.

¶6. (U) TURKISH SECURITY PRINCIPLES: Davutoglu outlined "four Turkish principles of security in the Middle East":

-- Equal security for all;
-- Frequent high level political dialogue among regional states, on the EU model;
-- Greater economic interdependence to deter conflict; and
-- "Multicultural coexistence," particularly in urban areas.

¶7. (U) TURKISH-SAUDI RELATIONS: Davutoglu characterized Turkish/Saudi relations as the "backbone" of Turkey's Middle East policy, based on shared interests in regional stability and prosperity. He addressed Turkish relations with Israel in the context of PM Erdogan's dressing-down of Israeli President Peres at Davos, noting that criticism of Israel does not imply anti-Semitism, and assuring that Turkey's relationship with Israel would recover.
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